

Message Text

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO ALL OAU CAPITALS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: FR, UR, XA

SUBJ: FRENCH-SOVIET CONSULTATIONS ON AFRICA

1. SUMMARY: QUAI DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA (GEORGY), JUST
RETURNED FROM TWO DAYS OF CONSULTATIONS IN MOSCOW ON
AFRICA, BELIEVES SOVIETS MAINTAIN THEIR AMBITIONS FOR
EXPANSION IN THAT CONTINENT. NEVERTHELESS, HE THINKS
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SOVIETS, HAVING TRIED TO TAKE TWO LARGE STEPS FORWARD
IN AFRICA, ARE CURRENTLY TAKING ONE STEP BACK TO AVOID
CONFRONTATION WITH THE WEST. SOVIETS STRESSED NEED TO
"DE-DRAMATIZE" AFRICAN SITUATION, AND APPEARED TO VALUE
DISCUSSION OF AFRICA WITH THE FRENCH. GEORGY THINKS
THEY HAVE AN INTEREST IN STABILITY IN NORTH AFRICA AND
ARE DEEPLY TROUBLED BY QADHAFI. END SUMMARY.

2. QUAI DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA (GEORGY), JUST RETURNED FROM TWO DAYS OF INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS IN MOSCOW ON AFRICA, AUGUST 9-10, GAVE CHARGE HIS IMPRESSIONS AUGUST 16. GEORGY SPENT SIX HOURS IN DISCUSSIONS WITH VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ILLITCHEV AND NINE HOURS WITH MFA'S THREE AFRICAN REGIONAL SECTION HEADS AND THEIR STAFFS. HE REPORTS THAT SOVIETS WERE EXTREMELY CORDIAL AND APPEARED TO VALUE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS AFRICA WITH FRENCH. THEY TOLD HIM THAT THEY CANNOT DISCUSS AFRICA WITH OTHER POWERS; WITH THE US DISCUSSIONS ALWAYS COME BACK TO STRATEGIC ISSUES SUCH AS SALT; WITH THE UK THEY HAVE LITTLE DIALOGUE AND THE FRG HAS NO REAL INTEREST OR EXPERTISE IN AFRICAN AFFAIRS. THE LEVEL OF SOVIET EXPERTISE WAS HIGHER THAN EXPECTED, BUT THE SOVIETS TRIED TO AVOID DISCUSSION OF SPECIFICS, AND KEPT TRYING TO COME BACK TO PROPAGANDISTIC GENERALITIES. GEORGY THOUGHT THEY HAD LITTLE REAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPLEXITIES AND FRAGILITY OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS.

3. GEORGY SAID HIS PRIMARY CONCLUSION WAS THAT THE SOVIETS MAINTAIN THEIR AMBITIONS FOR EXPANSION IN AFRICA. EVERYTHING THEY SAY IS, OF COURSE, COUCHED IN THEIR OWN TERMS, BUT THE MEANING IS CLEAR. AT THE SAME TIME, GEORGY THOUGHT THE SOVIETS WERE GOING CONFIDENTIAL

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THROUGH A PERIOD OF "SOFT-PEDALING" ON AFRICA. HE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE REITERATION OF THE NEED TO "DE-DRAMATIZE" THE SITUATION, A THEME WHICH RECURRED CONSTANTLY THROUGHOUT HIS DISCUSSIONS. GEORGY SURMISED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE IN THE PROCESS OF TAKING ONE STEP BACK, AFTER TRYING TO TAKE TWO BIG STEPS FORWARD AND MEETING WESTERN RESISTENCE. HE SAID THE SOVIETS APPEARED TO SEE THE WESTERN ROLE IN AFRICA IN TERMS OF ENCIRCLEMENT OF THE SOVIET UNION--OR AT LEAST CLAIMED THEY DID--THUS THE US AIRLIFT OF TROOPS TO SHABA WAS PART OF A BROAD NATO STRATEGY. BUT THE SOVIETS ALSO APPEARED TO WISH TO AVOID CONFRONTATION IN AFRICA, AND WERE CURRENTLY IN A PHASE OF STEPPING BACK AWAY FROM POSSIBLE CONFRONTATION. (GEORGY WAS CLEARLY PLEASED WITH THIS, WHICH HE SAW LARGELY AS AN OUTCOME OF THE SHABA INTERVENTION.)

4. GEORGY SAID THE SOVIETS WERE NOT SHARPLY CRITICAL OF FRENCH POLICY, AND THAT HE RESPONDED FRANKLY WHENEVER THEY WERE UNREASONABLE. OF THE MANY SPECIFIC COUNTRIES AND PROBLEMS WHICH WERE DISCUSSED, GEORGY NOTED DISCUSSIONS OF NORTH AFRICA AS THE MOST INTEREST-

ING AND REVEALING. HE SAID THAT THE EXPANSION OF SOVIET TIES WITH MOROCCO--TO THE POINT WHERE THEY MAY BE MORE IMPORTANT TO MOSCOW THAN SOVIET-ALGERIAN RELATIONS--HAS PLACED THE SOVIETS IN A POSITION WHERE THEY WISH TO AVOID HAVING TO CHOOSE SIDES BETWEEN THE ALGERIANS AND THE MOROCCANS. GEORGY BELIEVES THIS GIVES THE SOVIETS AN IMPORTANT INTEREST IN STABILITY IN NORTH AFRICA. THUS THE SOVIETS WOULD PROBABLY "DO WHAT WAS NECESSARY" TO MAKE POSSIBLE A SETTLEMENT IN THE SAHARA--AND POSSIBLY IN CHAD AS WELL. GEORGY SAID THE SOVIETS WERE DEEPLY TROUBLED BY QADHAFI BECAUSE OF HIS ADVENTURISM AND RELIGIOUS FANATICISM. GEORGY NOTED THAT HE WAS IN MOSCOW WHEN THE SINO-JAPANESE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP TREATY (PFT) WAS SIGNED, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PARTICULARLY ANGERED THAT JALLOU SHOULD CHOOSE THAT PARTICULAR MOMENT TO VISIT PEKING.

5. ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, GEORGY THOUGHT THE CONSULTATIONS HAD BEEN WORTHWHILE, AND MAY HAVE GIVEN THE SOVIETS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE LEGITIMATE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH LIE BEHIND FRENCH AFRICAN POLICY. GIVEN THIS APPRECIATION, AND THE FACT THAT THE CONSULTATIONS WERE EVIDENTLY ARRANGED AFTER GISCARD MENTIONED THE IDEA IN A LETTER TO BREZHNEV, WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THEY WERE TO BECOME A REGULAR FEATURE OF FRANCO-SOVIET RELATIONS. GAMMON UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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